



**One Hundred Ninth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20515**

March 18, 2005

The Honorable Michael Chertoff
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Chertoff:

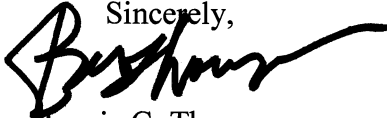
According to recent press reports, Mercyhurst College in Erie, Pennsylvania has received a no-bid \$96,000 contract to train intelligence analysts for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. It is my understanding that the process of determining the recipient of the training contract was closed and failed to consider other highly qualified educational institutions. Additionally, news articles report that this same college is opening a building later this year named after former Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge. It has also been alleged that Marlene Mosco, the chairperson of the Mercyhurst College Board of Trustees, once served as the co-chairperson of the state finance committee for the Tom Ridge for Governor Committee.

I am deeply concerned that the issuance of this sole source contract at a time when the recipient school is naming a building in honor of the former Secretary of Homeland Security creates a perception that this school was favored, not because of its ability to train intelligence analysts, but because of its close relationship to Department officials.

The Department should do all it can to ensure that all academic institutions are given the opportunity to contract with the agency. Where information does not jeopardize homeland security, there is simply no excuse for not providing details of the contract and explaining to the public why a particular institution received the contract. In this particular instance, what service was Mercyhurst College able to provide that no other college or university in the U.S. could provide? To better understand the Department's rationale in entering the no-bid contract with Mercyhurst College, I request that you provide the answers to the following questions within 14 days:

1. Does this contract comply with the limitations on no-bid contracts under federal law?
2. What steps, if any, were taken by the Department to determine whether other academic institutions had the capacity to meet the needs of this contract? If there are no other qualified institutions, how was that conclusion reached? If there are other qualified institutions, why were they excluded as possible recipients of the contract?
2. Who made the final decision that this should be a no-bid contract entered into with Mercyhurst College? What personnel within the Department were consulted or participated in the decision-making process.
3. What meetings and other events led to the decision to enter into this contract solely with Mercyhurst College?
4. What role did Booz Allen Hamilton, the contractor working with Mercyhurst College on some of its intelligence analyst training, have in the contracting process?
5. What role did former-Secretary Ridge or anyone in the Secretary's office have in the contract decision? Did Mr. Ridge have knowledge of this no-bid contract while he was serving as Secretary of the agency?
6. Other than Mercyhurst College, were any persons or entities outside of the Department contacted regarding the contract?
7. Reports state that the \$96,000 contract is for 15 departmental employees already working for the agency as intelligence analysts to take three courses over 32 weeks. Please confirm the cost and duration of the contract and provide an explanation as to how these numbers were reached.
8. Did any former or present personnel employed by the Department discuss the potential contract or any other contract or arrangement involving Mercyhurst College with Marlene Mosco?

Additionally, I would appreciate receiving copies of the response to any Freedom of Information Act requests you have received related to the Mercyhurst College contract.

Sincerely,


Bennie G. Thompson
Ranking Member
House Committee on Homeland Security